

McCone Denies Knowing Of CIA Plot to Kill Castro

By David C. Martin
Associated Press

Former CIA director John A. McCone has flatly denied knowledge of any agency plot to assassinate Cuban Premier Fidel Castro or any other foreign official.

"To my knowledge there's nothing that was brought to my attention that involves any attempt against Castro or any other person during my tenure of office," he said yesterday in a telephone interview.

"I had frequent meetings with the President and Robert Kennedy and with others who were concerned about Cuba and ... at no time at any of those meetings was any mention made of the assassination of Castro."

He headed the agency from 1961 to 1965 under the late Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson. Robert F. Kennedy was attorney general during his brother's administration and during the early Johnson years.

TIME MAGAZINE this week cited "credible sources" as saying "the CIA enlisted the expert hired-gun help of U.S. Mafia figures in several unsuccessful attempts to kill Castro both before and shortly after the CIA-planned Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in 1961."

Two former aides to Robert Kennedy, Adam Walinsky and Peter B. Edelman, have said he told them he learned of and stopped a CIA effort to use the Mafia to kill Castro prior to the Bay of Pigs.

McCone, who took over the agency following the Bay of Pigs, said he developed a close relationship



JOHN MCCONE
Denies involvement

with Robert Kennedy while CIA director and that "it would have been the most natural thing in the world" for Kennedy to have told him of the incident

MCCONE said he based his comments on his own recollection and on a search of his files made after news reports linking the CIA and the Mafia to assassination plots against Castro. He attributed reports of CIA involvement to bitter ex-employees of the agency.

Walinsky and Edelman said Kennedy told them in 1967 that while chief counsel to a Senate committee investigating organized crime in the late 1950s, he learned of the plot in questioning a Las Vegas mobster.

"It was unclear whether the arrangement had been made by someone associated with the agency or whether there was any official sanction within the

agency," Edelman said. Walinsky said Kennedy had received "assurances in writing" from the CIA that the plot had been aborted.

BUT Kenneth O'Donnell, who was assistant chief counsel to the committee and later White House chief of staff, said he never heard any mention of a plot to kill Castro. And Carmine Bellino, a chief investigator for the rackets committee who said he was present during all Kennedy's interviews with gangland figures, said he could not recall mention of such a plot.

"Bobby had no secrets from me," O'Donnell said of his years on the rackets committee. "I lived in his house for two years" and "there wasn't a memo that went through the committee that I didn't see."

"My knowledge is first hand," O'Donnell said, "and I would like to think that ... you're going to consider what I say as opposed to Walinsky and Edelman."

HOWEVER, he added: "To say that somebody in the CIA didn't give somebody fifty bucks and say here go knock off (Dominican Republic dictator Rafael) Trujillo, that I can't do."

The late Allen Dulles headed the CIA at the time Kennedy was chief counsel to the Senate committee. His top aide, Richard Bissell, said he never discussed a Castro assassination plot with Kennedy and that it was "inherently unlikely" that the agency, then under the control of a Republican administration, would provide written assurances to a Democratically controlled committee that such a plot had been aborted.